

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

COME-00 EB-11 LAB-06 SIL-01 OMB-01 TRSE-00 AID-20

IGA-02 IO-14 DRC-01 OC-06 CCO-00 OPR-02 A-01 SY-04

PC-10 /159 W

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P R 261800Z APR 74

FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3996

USIA WASHDC PRIORITY

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 1618

USCINCSO FOR POLAD

USIA FOR ILA

EO 11652 GDS

TAGS: ELAB PINT NU

SUBJECT: STRIKES ESCALATE AND GON IMPOSES CENSORSHIP

REF: MANAGUA 1545

1. SUMMARY: SUPPORT OF NICARAGUAN HOSPITAL WORKERS IN THEIR SEVEN WEEK STRIKE HAS CONSIDERABLY BROADENED WITH NUMEROUS SYMPATHY STRIKES BEING DECLARED IN MANAGUA AND OTHER CITIES. THE NATION'S CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY HAS BEEN ALMOST COMPLETELY STALLED. THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY IS BEING PRESSURED TO SUPPORT THE EFFORT BUT HAS SO FAR REMAINED NEUTRAL, AT LEAST IN PUBLIC.

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IN NEGOTIATIONS APRIL 24 THE GON REPORTEDLY MADE CONSIDERABLE

CONCESSIONS TO STRIKERS INCLUDING A WAGE INCREASE OFFER OF 22.5 PERCENT. DIALOGUE, HOWEVER, WAS BROKEN OFF LARGELY OVER WORKER DEMANDS FOR FULL COMPENSATION FOR TIME LOST DURING THE STRIKE. IN REACTION TO THE ESCALATED STRIKE ACTIVITY AND APPARENT LACK OF PROSPECTS FOR AN EARLY SETTLEMENT, THE GON IMPOSED CENSORSHIP ON ALL INFORMATION MEDIA FOR AS LONG AS STRIKES CONTINUE. STAGE SEEMS TO BET FOR A DIRECT CONFRONTATION BETWEEN GON AND UNIONS WITH THE BIG QUESTIONS NOW BEING WHO WILL GIVE IN FIRST AND WHETHER VIOLENCE WILL OCCUR IF THE GON BEGINS LARGE SCALE ARRESTS OF STRIKE SUPPORTERS. END SUMMARY.

2. SYMPATHY STRIKES IN SEVERAL CITIES HAVE BEEN CALLED AS UNIONS INCREASE PRESSURE TO FORCE GOVERNMENT CONCESSIONS TO STRIKING HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES. PRINCIPAL SHOCK TROOPS IN THIS EFFORT ARE MEMBERS OF SCAAS, THE POWERFUL COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED CONSTRUCTION UNION. TEN MAJOR CONSTRUCTION SITES IN MANAGUA HAVE BEEN HIT BRINGING CONSTRUCTION PRETTY MUCH TO A STANDSTILL IN THE CAPITAL. SCAAS MEMBERS IN LEON, MASAYA AND CHINANDEGA HAVE ALSO BROUGHT CONSTRUCTION IN THOSE CITIES TO A HALT. SOCIAL CHRISTIAN UNIONS ARE ALSO SUPPORTING THE HOSPITAL WORKERS NOTABLY WITH A SYMPATHY STRIKE IN ONE OF THEIR LARGEST MANAGUA AFFILIATES.

3. SECONDARY STUDENTS ARE ALSO GETTING IN THE ACT, REPORTEDLY CALLING STRIKES AT SEVERAL HIGH SCHOOLS IN MANAGUA AND OTHER CITIES.

4. SEEKING TO BROADEN THE FRONT OF SUPPORT FOR THE STRIKE, THE WORKERS ARE PRESSURING THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY TO INTERVENE ON BEHALF OF HOSPITAL WORKERS. THE SECRETARY GENERAL AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER OF CONSTRUCTION REPORTED TO EMBASSY OFFICIALS THAT SCAAS ASKED FOR THE CHAMBER'S INTERVENTION WITH THE GOVERNMENT. THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF INDE, THE PRIVATE SECTOR DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION, ALSO REPORTS THAT A SIMILAR APPROACH WAS MADE TO HIS GROUP. CHAMBER OF CONSTRUCTION PRESIDENT ENRIQUE PEREIRA SAID ON APRIL 24 THAT HE WAS GOING TO EL RETIRO TO CONSULT WITH GENERAL SOMOZA ON THE PROBLEM. ALTHOUGH SOME PRIVATELY EXPRESS SUPPORT OF THE HOSPITAL WORKERS, BUSINESSMEN HAVE BEEN EXTREMELY RELUCTANT TO OPENLY TAKE SIDES IN THE DISPUTE.

5. AT A NEGOTIATING SESSION APRIL 24 WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

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NURSES AND OTHER HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES THE GOVERNMENT MODERATED ITS POSITION ON WAGE INCREASES OFFERING A 22.5 PERCENT HIKE IN SALARIES. THE UNIONS IN TURN LOWERED THEIR DEMANDS FROM 45 TO 40 PERCENT. THIS PROGRESS TOWARD A SETTLEMENT, HOWEVER, DID NOT RESULT IN A FINAL AGREEMENT REPORTEDLY BECAUSE OF THE UNIONS' INSISTENCE OF BEING FULLY COMPENSATED FOR THE WORK TIME LOST DURING THE STRIKE. THE GOVERNMENT OFFERED A 5 PERCENT BONUS FOR ONE MONTH AS COMPENSATION. MEANWHILE THE ASSOCIATION OF RESIDENTS AND INTERNS

REQUESTED A PERSONAL MEETING WITH GENERAL SOMOZA TO DISCUSS MEANS OF SETTLING THE STRIKE. THE GENERAL RESPONDED BY REQUESTING THAT THEY QUOTE CONDUCT THEIR DISCUSSIONS WITH LABOR MINISTER ERNESTO NAVARRO RICHARDSON, MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY COMMITTEE FOR LABOR

AFFAIRS, TO WHOM I HAVE GIVEN MY INSTRUCTIONS FOR COORDINATING THESE MATTERS END QUOTE. THE TETS OF BOTH TELEGRAMS IN THIS EXCHANGE WERE PUBLISHED IN THE APRIL 24 NOVEDADES. WE ARE NOT AWARE OF ANY FURTHER DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN NAVARRO RICHARDSON AND THE ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVES SINCE AN APRIL 19 MEETING.

6. THE NATIONAL SOCIAL ASSISTANCE AND WELFARE BOARD RELEASED A COMMUNIQUE APRIL 25 BLAMING THE NURSES AND AUXILIARIES' ADVISOR, SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY PRESIDENT MANUEL MORALES, FOR CAUSING A BREAK-DOWN IN THE NEGOTIATIONS THROUGH HIS QUOTE INTRANSIGENT ND DILATORY TACTICS END QUOTE. THE COMMUNIQUE NOTES THAT, IN ADDITION TO ITS LAST OFFER ON THE SALARY ISSUE, THE BOARD HAS REACHED AGREEMENT WITH THE HOSPITAL WORKERS ON 38OF THEIR 39 DEMANDS.

7. IN THE FACE OF THIS APPARENT IMPASSE IN BOTH SERIES OF NEGOTIATIONS

AND THE SPREAD OF SYMPATHY STRIKES, THE GOVERNMENT TOOK DRASITC ACTION APRIL 25 TO CENSURE THE MEDIA IN AN EFFORT TO QUOTE PRESERVE DOMESTIC ORDER IN THE REPUBLIC END QUOTE. THIS NATIONAL GOVERNING COUNCIL'S CENSORSHIP DECREE RECOGNIZES IN ITS PREAMBLE QUOTE THE GRAVE RISKS INCURRED TO THE DETRIMENT O THE HEALTH OF THE SICK END QUOTE CAUSED BY THE STRIKE AND OUTLINES THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE GON HAS GONE OUT OF ITS WAY TO RESPOND TO THE HOSPITAL WORKERS DEMANDS IN SPITE OF THE STRIKE'S ILLEGALITY. THE PREAMBLE FURTHER STATES QUOTE THAT KNOWN AGITATORS HAVE BEEN CARRYING OUT ACTIVITIES WHICH TEND TO DISRUPT THE PEACE AND TRQNQUILITY OF THE NATION, PROVOKING OTHER ILLEGAL STRIKES AND SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES
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BY MEANS OF ORGANS OF
SPOKEN, WRITTEN AND TELEVISED PUBLICITY IN ABUSE OF THE UNRESTRICTED FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION ENJOYED IN NICARAGUA. END QUOTE.

8. AFTER THE LENGTHY PREAMBLE THE OPERATIVE TEXT OF THE DECREE IS AMAZINGLY BRIEF BUT VERY BROADLY PHRASED. FOLLOWING IS UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION: QUOTE FIRST: CIVILIAN AND MILITARY AUTHORITIES ARE AUTHORIZED TO TAKE THE PREVENTATIVE MEASURES NECESSARY TO INSURE PUBLIC ORDER WITHIN THE CONFINES OF THE NATIONAL DISTRICT. SECOND: CENSORSHIP OF ALL SPOKEN, WRITTEN AND TEVEVISED PUBLICITY MEDIA IS ESTABLISHED WITHIN THOSE CONFINES. THIRD: THESE MEASURES WILL REMAIN IN EFFECT SO LONG AS THE CAUSES MOTIVIATING THEM EXIST. END QUOTE. SPETEL COVERS RAMIFICTIONS AND IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENATION OF THIS DECREE.

9. COMMENT: WITH DIALOGUE BROKEN OFF AND THE CONFLICT ESCALATING THE STAGE APPEARS TO BE SET FOR A DIRECT CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE UNIONS AND THE GON. IT WILL NOW BE A QUESTION OF WHO BLINKS FIRST. IMPORTANT FACTORS TO WATCH WILL BE WHAT POSITION IF ANY THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY TAKES IN THE DISPUTE AND THE DEGREE TO WHICH STUDENTS INCREASE THEIR ACTIVE SUPPORT OF THE STRIKE. IN ADDITION, A VERY IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION WILL BE THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE GON FEELS COMPELLED TO ARREST AND PUNISH STRIKE SUPPORTERS. THE APRIL 25 DECREE ALONG WITH OTHER POWERS ACQUIRED UNDER THE NEW PENAL CODE GIVE THE GON CONSIDERABLE LATITUDE IN THIS REGARD. SO FAR ARRESTS HAVE BEEN KEPT TO A MINIMUM AND MOSTLY CONFINED TO THE DEPARTMENTS. HOWEVER, IF THE GON GIVES THE STRIKE SUPPORTERS A NUMBER OF IMPRISONED MARTYRS ESPECIALLY IN THE MANAGUA AREA THE SITUATION COULD BECOME EVEN MORE TENSE AND THE POSSIBILITY OF VIOLENCE HEIGHTENED.
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